
Position Statement on Secondary-Level Education

Adopted June 5, 1996

The Connecticut State Board of Education recognizes that adolescence — ranging roughly from ages 13 to 18 — is a critical, unique and often turbulent period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is essential that secondary schools serving these young adults nurture and support this transition by providing educational opportunities which prepare students for a fulfilling life, continuous learning and productive work in the 21st century.

Opportunities for Students

An effective high school develops and implements its entire program in order to ensure that the transition from dependence to independence is supported by ongoing opportunities for students to:

- develop self-reliance, the discipline necessary to assume personal responsibility for their learning, and qualities of character such as integrity, honesty and respect for others;
- become lifelong learners who are equipped with not only basic skills in mathematics, reading, writing and problem solving, but also study skills, academic self-confidence, curiosity and a disposition to use these skills and attributes to advance their learning;
- be engaged in relevant and meaningful projects and activities that integrate what is learned in classes and extend that learning beyond the school building; and
- experience the world beyond classroom walls through independent studies, work-study programs, internships, community activities and other activities dedicated to helping others.

School Characteristics

The Board believes that these aspirations for Connecticut's adolescents can best be achieved in high schools that incorporate the following characteristics:

- a clear mission to empower all students and a commitment to high levels of performance and student achievement that extends throughout all of the educational activities within the district;

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- a program of studies that reflects rigorous and relevant content with a strong emphasis on the application of skills and knowledge within and across academic disciplines;
- an instructional focus that promotes active, independent and cooperative learning, and accommodates a wide variety of learning styles;
- a commitment to the implementation of activities which require performance of skills in applied settings, and to integration — not fragmentation — of these activities; and
- ready access to and ongoing instructional use of a wide variety of technologies, including computers, calculators, scientific laboratory equipment, electronic databases, educational television and interactive video, etc.

Enabling Conditions

Moreover, the Board believes that there are certain conditions which enable teachers and administrators to create and implement such high-quality schools. These conditions include:

- a safe, secure and orderly environment in which every student feels respected, is cared about, and has at least one adult mentor/advocate who is personally responsible for ongoing guidance of the student;
- a willingness to schedule the school day and school year in a way that helps to focus the school as a community of learners;
- a staff of educators well versed in the academic subjects they teach, who know, understand and respond to the unique characteristics and needs of adolescents, and who work to create a humane environment where individual and cultural differences are respected and valued;
- ongoing professional development opportunities, including updates on pertinent and current research in subjects they teach, technological advancements and the means by which these can be incorporated into the high school curriculum;
- ongoing opportunities for professional interaction, including common planning time for colleagues within a disciplinary area and among a number of disciplinary areas, team teaching, and professional discussions of student work, student accomplishment and student behavior;

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- open and frequently used internal and external lines of communication with and among students, the faculty and administration, parents, and the community at large; and
 - a network of partnerships and other linkages that bring the school into constant contact with the outside world and that emphasize school-to-career programs which connect students with the community, the workplace and all types of postsecondary educational opportunities.